



Flagship #18: Tackling stigma and discrimination

EU Support Package on tackling stigma and discrimination

Collection of best and promising practices (EU Best Practice Portal)

This collection of best and promising practices via the [EU Best Practice Portal](#) is part of the EU Support Package on stigma around mental health, which was presented on 10 October 2024, World Mental Health Day.

Best practices

DENMARK - Act Belong Commit

Country	Denmark
Practice owner	International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA)
Link to the Best Practices Portal	Act Belong Commit

Short summary description of the practice

The increasing severity of global mental health challenges has underscored the need for effective mental health promotion. In response, the ACT-BELONG-COMMIT (ABC) campaign was initiated. This evidence-based initiative aims to enhance mental health and wellbeing at individual, community, and societal levels, focusing on sports communities. The ABC campaign simplifies mental health promotion into three core actions: Act (being active physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually), Belong (maintaining friendships, social ties, and participating in group activities), and Commit (setting goals and engaging in meaningful activities). The Danish ABC partnership is a collaborative effort led by researchers at the University of Copenhagen, initially established at the National Institute of Public Health. This partnership operates as a social franchise, disseminating the ABC campaign to various internal and external partners, including the Danish Sports Association (DGI), the Mental Health Foundation, the Danish Healthy Cities Network, and the Centre for Prevention in Praxis. Together, they form a secretary responsible for capacity building, developing communication and campaign materials, supporting municipalities in implementing the ABC principles, and organising network meetings. This holistic approach aims to reshape environments for better mental health support, showcasing the best practice model in mental health promotion.

Relevance to address stigma

Evidence stemming from the analysis of the results generated by Act Belong Commit suggests that all the initiatives organised within the programme led to significant decreases in terms of stigma towards people with mental health conditions, as well as more openness about mental health issues in society. In fact, mental health promotion through prevention interventions like ABC effectively attracts the involvement of those with a diagnosed mental issue. Evidence related to the programme also indicates that these individuals responded to the campaign to a greater extent than those not reporting such. Furthermore, their involvement was facilitated by the campaign's perceived impact on stigma.

DENMARK – One of Us

Country	Denmark
Practice owner	Danish Health Authority
Link to the Best Practices Portal	One of Us

Short summary description of the practice

ONE OF US is a national anti-stigma program in Denmark with targeted national, regional and local activities. Launched in 2011, ONE OF US is organised as a part of The Danish Health Authority, where the programme is managed nationally. At the regional level ONE OF US is located in the regional divisions called PsykInfo (Psychiatric Information Centre) that are part of each of the five regions of Denmark. The national and regional levels of ONE OF US work closely together. ONE OF US is formed by a wide range of public and private organisation in the field of mental health: The Danish Health Authority, TrygFonden, Danish Regions, the five regions, The Danish Mental Health Fund, The National Board of Social Services, The Danish Mental Health Network, KL and The Danish Committee for Health Education. In August 2021, ONE OF US went through an organisational change and integrated in the Danish Health Authority and the partnership became an advisory group.

Relevance to address stigma

The programme facilitates contact and an open dialogue between people with lived experience of a mental illness and the many different target groups within five target areas:

- Service users and relatives.
- Young people.
- The labour market.
- Professionals in health and social services.
- The media and the public.

This objective is reached by:

- Increasing the knowledge about a life with a mental illness
- Decreasing the distance between people with and without a mental illness, which otherwise leads to stigma, prejudices and social exclusion
- Creating a better understanding of mental illness in schools, in health care, in workplaces and wherever else everyday life is lived

This allows to create a society where it is easier for an individual with a mental illness to live a good and meaningful life as an equal member of society. In addition, social contact is promoted in different ways through presentations by ambassadors in many different settings, training and information events, festivals, distribution of awareness materials, happenings and creative activities.

GREECE - Living and Learning Together. Awareness, Prevention and Resilience Building in School

Country	Greece
Practice owner	Society of Social Psychiatry (Non-profit scientific organization)
Link to the Best Practices Portal	Living and Learning Together

Short summary description of the practice

A substantial amount of research indicates a strong association between poor mental health and increased dropout rates among students in vocational and higher education. Concurrently, the reduction of child violence remains a top priority for the World Health Organization's European sector (WHO/Europe). Additionally, the stigma surrounding mental health issues often results in social exclusion and isolation, potentially leading to depression and, in severe cases, suicide among vulnerable young individuals. In response to these challenges, a pioneering organisation in Greece, known for its reform efforts in the mental health system, has leveraged its experience from operating Mobile Mental Health Units throughout the country. Utilising this acquired expertise, the organisation has developed a Practice specifically designed to engage and assist school communities facing crises.

Relevance to address stigma

The initiative aims to build resilience in school communities via a multidisciplinary, comprehensive, and participatory methodology. In particular, the specific objectives of the programme include the following:

- raise the level of knowledge/awareness about mental health issues and human rights.
- increase the level of resilience within the school community.
- improve school mechanisms (ability to liaise with local mental health services, identify students at risk, prevent/reduce school violence /dropout rates/ discrimination and exclusion practices/behaviours).

Overall, 24 Greek schools were engaged, with more than 5000 beneficiaries among students, teachers, and parents. Positive change were observed concerning the level of knowledge/awareness on human/child rights, mental health issues, available resources, and support networks, communication/socialisation/self-expression skills of students, awareness about stigma/change of attitudes towards vulnerable groups of students, skills to acknowledge and deal with trauma/stress/stigmatising practices among students, the ability to deal with crisis at school among teachers or home among parents, the increase of networking between schools and mental health / social care services, and the adoption of new practices to anticipate crises and promote resilience in schools. The practice was well-received by the students, who were provided with education materials for determining how to identify and prevent stigmatisation of people with mental health issues. In addition, high levels of teacher and parent involvement enhanced students' awareness on the topic.

ITALY - H-work project

Country	Italy
Practice owner	University of Bologna
Link to the Best Practices Portal	H-work project

Short summary description of the practice

The Horizon Europe H-WORK Project has the objective of improving mental well-being in the workplace by evaluating psychosocial risks and implementing targeted interventions. The project consisted of several essential components, including an Assessment Toolkit, which is a protocol used to determine psychosocial risks through interviews and questionnaires and gather both qualitative and quantitative data on employee well-being. Additionally, there was an Interventions Toolkit, which is a set of validated, multi-level interventions structured as an integrated methodology that can be customised to meet different organisational needs. The project was aimed at employees and employers working in public organisations and SMEs across Europe.

Relevance to address stigma

The H-WORK project aims to enhance mental health in public organisations and SMEs across Europe. It has specific objectives that include the following:

- to develop and validate comprehensive toolkits for assessment.
- to develop and validate comprehensive toolkits for intervention.
- to develop and validate comprehensive toolkits for evaluation while also providing innovative products and services.
- to develop a digital Innovation Platform to ensure solutions' long-term viability and dissemination.
- to disseminate policy briefs.

These interventions were concretely implemented at workplace level, boosting positive mental health attributes like leadership knowledge and employee engagement. Still, they were notably effective in preventing the deterioration of mental ill-health issues like burnout, stress, and depression. This is especially significant as most interventions were conducted between the first and second waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. These consequences led to decreased levels of workplace stigma, enhancing overall productivity and ensuring more involvement of people diagnosed with mental health issues.

SPAIN – ACCOMPANYA’M, a novel multimodal intervention plan	
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Country	Spain
Practice owner	Hospital
Link to the Best Practices Portal	ACCOMPANYA’M

Short summary description of the practice

The prevalence of health problems among individuals with intellectual disabilities is six times higher than that of the general population. In particular, in adolescents with serious delinquent behaviours, severe mental disorder (SMD) is twice as high as in the general population, and they show constant re-admissions in the acute and subacute units. The centre Accompanya’m was created to respond to the increase in behavioural problems and mental health disorders of children in difficult situations.

Relevance to address stigma

From its opening until December 31, 2022, Accompanya'm Unit has served 110 children and adolescents, with an average cumulative stay of 13 months. Throughout this period, the focus was held on a population at serious risk of exclusion and social marginalisations due to mental illness. Therefore, the unit attended to children and adolescents under the age of 18 with a diagnosis of severe mental disorders of high clinical, family, and social complexity, who presented a torpid evolution due to the specific characteristics of their disorder or due to a high degree of dysfunction in their socio-familial environment, which did not allow for treatment in hospital and community resources, or specialised social services for care of children and adolescents. In details, the actions implemented for addressing stigma related to mental illnesses experienced by patients treated by the unit include:

- Specialised differential diagnosis through observations and questionnaires.
- Family, social, and educational analysis.
- Diagnosis and treatment of somatic illnesses.
- Elaboration of an individual therapeutic programme.
- Comprehensive educational, therapeutic intervention.
- Psychotherapeutic and psychoeducational intervention based on existing mental health problems.
- Family therapeutic intervention.
- Socio-educational intervention by a reference educator.
- Nursing intervention to provide comprehensive and continuous care.
- Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary coordination.
- Pedagogical specialised intervention by a teacher from the Department of Education.
- Social intervention to access the different socio-labour resources and to foster reintegration in the community.
- Continuous assessment and intervention.
- Animal Assisted Therapeutic Programme

These actions allowed to empower patients, letting them feel in a safe environment in which their recovery was facilitated, as most patients were able to return to their original family home. Overall, the programme has worked on educating patients and their families in recognising stigma and preventing its consequences by relying on a multidisciplinary team of specialised professionals available in public hospitals.

Promising practices

FRANCE - Beyond Barriers: The Renaissance of Workforce Models in France's Mental Healthcare - A Triple Mixed Exploration

Country	France
Practice owner	Hospital (coordinator of mobile crisis unit and programme manager of psychiatric patient therapeutic education)
Link to the Best Practices Portal	Beyond Barriers

Short summary description of the practice

As mental healthcare undergoes transformation, the introduction of "emerging professions" such as Advanced Practice Nurses and Professional Peer/Family Peer Helpers aligns with a shift toward collaborative, recipient-centred care delivery. The study encompassed in this practice investigates integrating these innovative roles in a French adult psychiatric hospital, aiming to understand their impact on service delivery and recipient outcomes, thereby reshaping mental health care beyond traditional boundaries. This progressive approach signifies a necessary paradigm shift and commits to benefiting users, caregivers, practitioners, administrators, and policymakers. This promising practice aspires to fortify mental health systems across Europe by aligning with WHO priorities and EU strategies.

Relevance to address stigma

The initiative focused on training and upskilling multidisciplinary teams within the Hospitals of Saint Maruice (Ile-de-France, France) for assessing their impact on mental healthcare, reducing stigma, and improving quality of life of patients while increasing recipient empowerment. These aspects were monitored through outcome indicators adopted throughout all the initiatives undertaken by trained professionals, as the continuous measurement of these factors facilitated the ongoing assessment of performance and progress throughout the whole programme. The main outcomes stemming from the initiative highlight the transformative impact of integrating workforce models in a French adult psychiatric hospital. In fact, the incorporation of Peer/Family Peer Helpers into multidisciplinary teams and the use of blended learning had a positive effect on overall care delivery, thus resulting in comprehensive and holistic care for recipients as well as improved treatment compliance. The pivotal roles played by Peer/Family Peer Helpers allowed individuals to overcome challenges and build stronger support systems, also reducing the stigma associated with mental health and creating a more inclusive and empowering environment.

SPAIN - BIZI Programme: An interactive, online, self-managed, and open-access course to promote suicide prevention in community settings

Country	Spain
Practice owner	Basque Public Health System
Link to the Best Practices Portal	BIZI Programme

Short summary description of the practice

Suicide causes more than 45,000 deaths each year in the EU. Although suicide can be prevented, only a minor percentage of citizens access specialised help in the weeks prior to suicide, partly due to the lack of knowledge and stigma surrounding the phenomenon. The use of new formats (e.g., open access and online) is changing this situation, allowing a broader dissemination of knowledge. However, these solutions are still scarce; no known studies support their effectiveness. For this reason, a gatekeeper training programme was designed to contribute to suicide prevention at the community level. This programme consists of an online, interactive, self-managed, short, and free-access course that has been shown to improve critical competencies for suicide prevention in community professionals (social workers, educators, pharmacists, etc.). This might be among the first programmes of this type in which such efficacy has been demonstrated.

Relevance to address stigma

BIZI Programme overall goal is to create, evaluate, and implement an online, concise, self-administered, and freely accessible training tool to disseminate Gatekeeper (GTK) competencies in suicide prevention within community settings. Specific objectives include:

- Developing the tool leveraging scientific evidence and accumulated experience in the Basque Country.
- Assessing its impact on the three key GTK competence areas: attitude, self-efficacy, and knowledge, as well as on programme adherence and satisfaction.
- Deploying the tool to reach as many social agents as possible for ongoing evaluation and adaptation

These instruments allowed for non-health professionals and volunteers to recognise the early symptoms of discrimination due to stigma towards mental health patients vulnerable to suicide, achieving significant improvements in attitude, self-efficacy, and knowledge.